

# NEWS RELEASE

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For Immediate Release

**January 30, 2006**

## **TWO SENTENCED FOR ROLE IN EAST ST. LOUIS VOTE-BUYING SCHEME**

Edward E. McNally, United States Attorney for the Southern District of Illinois, announced today the sentencing in United States District Court on January 30 of two individuals convicted last June of offenses relating to vote buying in East St. Louis in the 2004 federal election.

**SHEILA THOMAS**, age 33, of East St. Louis, was sentenced to a term 18 months imprisonment, a fine of \$200, a \$200 special assessment, and a two year term of supervised release to follow her incarceration. In June 2005, THOMAS was convicted following a 17 day jury trial of one count of conspiring with others to buy votes and one count of aiding and abetting vote buying. Evidence adduced at trial showed that THOMAS was the elected Democratic Precinct Committeeman for the 17<sup>th</sup> Precinct in East St. Louis and that she and certain other Democratic precinct committeemen conspired with each other and with other precinct workers to pay voters for voting in the 2004 election in amounts ranging from \$5 to \$10 per vote. Specifically, the evidence showed that codefendant **CHARLES POWELL, Jr.**, who was the Chairman of the East St. Louis Democratic Party, used three precinct committeemen meetings in October 2005, to instruct East St. Louis' Democratic precinct committeemen to use money obtained from the St. Clair County Democratic Party to pay voters for voting in the election. The evidence showed that the three races that the conspirators were attempting to influence were the races for President of the United States, Justice of the Illinois Supreme Court, and Chair of the St. Clair County Board of Commissioners. POWELL was also convicted by the same jury of conspiring to buy votes and is scheduled for sentencing on February 13, 2006, in East St. Louis. The United States had recommended that **THOMAS** receive a sentence within the guideline range established by the United States Sentencing Commission, which was between 18 and 24 months.

Also sentenced was **YVETTE JOHNSON**, age 47, of Centreville, Illinois. JOHNSON was also convicted by the jury of one count of conspiring to pay voters for voting and one count of aiding and abetting vote buying. JOHNSON was sentenced to a term of 2 years probation with a condition that the first five months of that sentence be served as home confinement. JOHNSON was also ordered to pay a \$200 fine and a \$200 special assessment. Evidence adduced at trial showed that JOHNSON was a precinct worker in East St. Louis' 25<sup>TH</sup> precinct, which was the precinct of codefendant **KELVIN ELLIS**, the former Director of Regulatory Affairs for the City of East St. Louis. The evidence showed that JOHNSON was instructed by ELLIS to pay voters in amounts ranging from \$5 to \$10. ELLIS was also convicted of conspiring to buy votes and is scheduled for sentencing on February 6, 2006, in East St. Louis. The United States had recommended that **JOHNSON** receive a sentence within the guideline range established by the United States Sentencing Commission, which was between 10 and 16 months, but which also permits the Court to direct that up to half of the sentence be served in community confinement or home detention.

A fifth codefendant, **JESSE LEWIS**, was also convicted following the jury trial and is scheduled for sentencing on February 6, 2006.

Information for the indictment and convictions was obtained through the cooperative efforts of the United States Attorney's Office, the Federal Bureau of Investigation, the United States Postal Service, the Criminal Division of the Internal Revenue Service, and the Illinois State Police. The investigation is continuing.

The case is being prosecuted by Assistant United States Attorneys Michael C. Carr and James M. Cutchin.